

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SPARKS' WORLD FAMOUS SHOWS - Season 1916.
by C.E. Duble, CHS.

John Ringling, while speaking of circuses more than twenty years ago, referred to the Sparks Circus as the "No. 2 Ringling Show". The splendid reputation this circus always had for being a clean and high class organization under Chas. Sparks' ownership is well known to all. This was one of the most popular circuses ever to tour the Eastern and New England States where it appeared year after year. Its great reputation throughout the South must not be overlooked.

The Winter Quarters for years were in Macon, Ga., where the show opened each Spring. John H. Sparks was the founder of the show and from around 1900 to 1906 the title used was the "JOHN H. SPARKS OLD VIRGINIA SHOWS", using two cars at the start and gradually using more. By 1909 it had grown to a 10-car circus with the best of equipment and everything about the show was spic and span in appearance. Jack Phillips began as Bandmaster in 1913 season and remained fifteen consecutive seasons. The Sparks show always had a first class band. John H. Sparks passed on about 1906. A small scratch on the arm by a lion with the show, caused his untimely end. A monument is erected to his memory at East Brady, Penna., When the show appeared there in 1916 services were held, the Sparks family and officials attended, and the circus band rendered appropriate music.

Chas. Sparks was an adopted son of John H. Sparks and took over full management and control of the show following the passing of the founder. About 1923 the show was enlarged to 20 cars.

The writer was with the show 1916 season, a splendid 15 car show at that time. T.W. Ballenger was General Agent; J.C. Kelly, legal representative; Clifton Sparks, Treasurer (He was a son of John H. Sparks, owner); Wm. Morgan, Secretary; C.S. Clarke, advertising Car Manager; E.L. Doty, 24-hour man; Jack Phillips, Bandmaster; Bert. Mayo, Equestrian Director; J.S. Robertson, was manager side-show; Arthur Wright, leader side-show band and Georgia Minstrels.

Salisbury, N.C., was the opening stand April 10th. First stop in N.Y. State was at Salamanca, May 19th. All of the New England States were played and 17 stands made in Maine. Show was up to the Canadian border at Fort Kent. At Calais, Maine; parade went over to St. Stephen, N.B. A long run was made from Rumford Falls, Me., to Houlton, Me., - 268 miles on the Bangor & Aroostock Railway. Bridgeport, Conn., was a two day stand August 4-5th. At Barnesville, Ohio, August 16th a late arrival over the B & O Ry. caused the cancellation of parade and matinee. Great business at night. Huntington, W. Va., was the Labor Day date to big business, one of the biggest days of the season. At Erwin, Tenn; September 13th the largest elephant of the herd "Mary" had to be executed, being hung from a crane mounted on a flat car on the C.C.&O. Ry., and the body was buried in the railroad yards. The elephant had killed a young fellow the day before at Kingsport, Tenn; He was an attendant in the menagerie.

Crowds turned out for the circus in Georgia as show was in that state three weeks and a day. At Fitzgerald, Ga., October 18th on account of a terrific rainstorm, the night performance had to be called off. Show entered North Carolina November 1st at Rowland, remaining in that State almost four weeks showing 22 stands. November 13th to 20th all railroad movements were over the Atlantic Coast Line Ry., and all short moves. Total number of towns played entire season 197. Concord, N.C. November 25th was the closing stand and show returned to quarters at Salisbury, N.C.

(to be concluded in next issue)

NOTES FROM THE SECRETARY'S MAILBAG

In a letter to Walter Pietschmann CHS Treasurer - and in reference to the visit of Tyson, Lyon and Pietschmann on the Terrell Jacobs Circus at Guelph - Terrell Jacobs says "It certainly was an honour to have your association present to me an Honorary Membership. You can assure each and every member that I am very proud of this honour, and I can find no words to express in writing my deep feelings. You may also rest assured that in regards to the Circus I will always do my utmost to preserve Circus History and material".

The photo of the Terrell Jacobs' presentation enclosed with this issue of the BANDWAGON is supplied through courtesy of the President, W.W. Tyson. This picture was taken immediately following the ceremony, and shows Terrell replying on behalf of Dolly and himself. Sec. Lyon on the left and W.W. Tyson on the right of photo.

If any of the members of CHS enter the armed services, drop a line to the Secretary and give your new address so that all publications may reach you promptly.

The members will notice that through lack of space the Auction Column is missing from this issue, but it will be back again in the August issue. In regard to this do not be hesitant about sending in a bid no matter how small it may be, for you may find yourself the owner of some of the fine items that are offered. Remember too - send in all local circus news; and ask any questions regarding circus history. We will endeavour to answer to the best of our ability.

Tom Parkinson CHS writes that he has part of his collection on display in the foyer of the Library at the University of Illinois. It will remain there for about three weeks.

Ed. H. Meyers CHS printed a novel card announcing "TWO BIG CIRCUSES IN ANN ARBOR ON SATURDAY, June 20th." namely, Cole Bros., Circus and Tiny Bros., Circus (Meyers' own miniature). A real idea from a real fan!

Burns M. Kattenberg CHS is planning on publishing a book covering the History of Contortionists. Any members who can send any information regarding old-time or present day performers in this line, do not fail to communicate with Burns.

Jack Lyon - Secretary.

Advertisements similar to following accepted at 25¢ each.

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Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Man - Tom Thumb & Wife - Barnum's "What - is - it" couple.

5 x 7 photos of the above for only 35¢ ea. or all three for One dollar. Postpaid.

Bill Green, 312 North C., St., Washington, Kansas, U.S.A. - -

TERRELL JACOBS CIRCUS PHOTOS

First views of train, wagons, animals, etc.,

Send 10¢ (coin) for detailed list and sample photo. All postcard size.

Walter W. Tyson, 27 Green St., Guelph, Ontario, Canada.

A SEASON WITH R.T. RICHARDS CIRCUS 1917 (3rd instalment-concluded).
by F. M. Farrell, Ithaca, N.Y.

The five elephants walked from town to town and walking on pavement and stepping on stones, sometimes their feet would get sore, so they used to put leather boots on their feet. On the morning of June 20th going from Lee, Mass., to Chester, they went through the Berkshire Hills. For several miles there was a dense woods on each side of the road. A motorist coming up behind the elephants blew his horn, which scared them and they stampeded into the woods. They rounded up four of them that afternoon and got the fifth one late next day. They got into Huntington the night of the 21st of June just after the night-performance. So the show didn't have the advertised herd of elephants in Chester or Huntington. The July 4th stand was Fitchbur, Mass., where we celebrated by having three special meals.

The show after touring New England for the Summer, returned to New York State at Rye, Aug. 26, and most of the performers spent the afternoon and evening at Rye Beach. Showed in Rye Monday Aug. 27th; Mamorneck 28; and North Phelan 29th. Then into New York City, Aug. 30 to Sept 1st showing on 143rd St., off Lennon Avenue. Labor Day stand was Union Hill, N.J., The show spent 13 days in New Jersey, the last stand being Lambertville Sept 14th; Doylestown, Pa., Sept. 15 and several stands in Penna., then into Delaware and Eastern Maryland.

The Sept. 26th stand was Newark, Dele. The show was in early and set up in time for an afternoon performance, but the stringer truck got lost. As they couldn't put seats up without stringers we had to blow the afternoon show. So came evening and still no stringers and time to open the doors to the Big Show. We opened the side show on time and packed them in. The Management announced shortly after eight that there would be no night show on account of "no seats". The crowd yelled "We will stand up" - - so the show went on with the audience standing.

Delaware City, Dele., was the Oct. 3rd stand and when the show arrived, the circus paper was all covered. The advance crew was back on the show, as the show would close the season on Saturday. They were asked why they had let the theatre billposter cover our paper. They said the theatrical billposters claimed the show had cancelled the date. So our billposters went out and covered every theatre sheet in town and in the country with our own paper. We had a good days business even if our paper had been covered.

We were now approaching the closing stand, and the closing day with a circus is always a sad time. The show closed the season in Media, Pa., Sat., Oct. 6th with a farewell chicken dinner in the dining tent. While we were eating, Alf. T. Ringling told us, that if the war was over that Winter the show would go out in the Spring, and we could all come back, but if the war did not end, the show would not go out. So the show didn't go out!

In November 1936 I was informed that the Estate and Winter Quarters at Oakridge, N.J., was evidently in other hands. The Lake Development Co., had a sign and office at the main gatehouse and on the mansion was a modern sign "Circus Inn" - open year round. Some bungalows had been erected on the shores of the Lake.

Alf. T. Ringling, Richard T. Ringling, Sam McCracken and a good number of others that were on the show that season have gone to their reward, and each year I hear or read of another passing on.

--- The End ---

Sells & Downes Circus train was wrecked by freight train at Choctaw, Okla; Sept 20th 1902. Two rear cars were completely demolished. Two show attaches killed and others injured.

-----C. E. Duble, CHS.

TERRELL JACOBS WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS.
Program.

Freddie - Horseback-riding Lion presented by Dolly Jacobs. Clown number. Coriell Bros., - Juggling. Mme. Teena - Spanish Web. Menage Number "Boy Blue" ridden by Dolly Jacobs. Coriell Family - Acrobats. Clowns again. Elephants presented by Bill Woodcock. Vern Coriell - Head Slide. Feature Act - mixed group of Lions and Tigers presented by Terrell Jacobs.

REGARDING NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS.

So many circusiiana collectors seem to overlook the historical importance of mounting all newspaper clippings, circus ads and similar material in scrap books. These should be neatly trimmed, and dated, and if desirable make a note also of the paper's name from which they were clipped. Even books containing circus scraps of only ten or fifteen years ago are very interesting today, but when we go back into "ancient history" of the show business, then they are a wealth of information. As examples we are pleased to reproduce the following, as copied from the Guelph (Ont., Canada) Mercury of these early days.

July 12th 1872: "The sensation of today is Dan Rice's circus, which entered town this morning with all the pomp and circumstance and brassy harmony usually attendant upon such occasions. The procession was headed by the band-car, drawn by an uncountable and unaccountable number of horses, who must have had an easy time of it. The most attractive feature was at the tail of the procession, and consisted of a really magnificent elephant, the largest we have ever seen, stalking along in solitary dignity, with two comical looking juvenile trunk-bearers following at its heels, whilst a fine camel brought up the rear. The exhibition tents are now in full blast".

Cole's Circus procession of July 12th 1876: "The wagons, horses, cages &c., belonging to Cole's Menagerie and Circus arrived a little after five o'clock this morning by Grand Trunk At the head of the procession was a gilded band chariot drawn by a team of horses and ten camels, in which were about twenty musicians. Then followed in succession knights and ladies on horseback, war chariots driven by ladies on horseback, a gilded chariot in shape like a dragon, a richly caprisoned young elephant, a cage containing two lions and a leopard, in which GONKLIN the tamer was composedly sitting, a number of cages containing animals, a glass cage of serpents, in which sat a Hindoo fondling the loathsome reptiles, another handsome gilded chariot, and a calliope or steam organ, on which was played a number of popular airs, ended the long line. Fastened on top of several of the cages were performing automatons, which went through a number of laughable antics."

The Mercury of Sept. 23rd 1885. - reported on "Jumbo's Internal Domain being a Museum of Curiosities" as follows: "When Jumbo's stomach was cut open at St. Thomas by butchers, a miscellaneous collection of all sorts of articles unfit for anything but goat and ostrich food, was found therein. The collection was composed of cartridges, buttons, nails, screws, stones, coins, etc., about half a peck in all. Amongst the coins are American nickels, Canadian coppers and a few silver pieces . . and British farthings. A large number of persons are in possession of coins, nails etc., taken from Jumbo's grub bag and intend keeping them as mementoes . . . The weight of Jumbo's hide was 1,587 lbs. Jumbo's bones were preserved with salt and alum and packed in cases. Part of the hide was put in a box, and the remainder left in a vat, and was placed on a railway car and sent to Rochester, N.Y., there to be prepared and mounted at Ward's natural science establishment".

And so it goes! - newspaper clippings collected today - will, in future years be invaluable to circus historians and collectors. Let us see to it, as members of the CHS that such items are preserved in a manner, suitable for future use.

W. W. T.